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ABSTRACT

This study examined the authorship and discourse types of Canadian basal anthologies to determine whether the lingering centrality of the basal anthology in Canadian programs controls students and teachers by controlling language and reading. Each selection within five Canadian basal series (Gage Expressways II, Ginn Journeys, Holt Impressions, McGraw-Hill Ryerson Unicorn, and Nelson Networks) in grades one, three, and five were coded for authorship and discourse type. Results indicated that although Canadian programs still exhibit some of the controlling features characteristic of basal readers produced in the United States, the basal publishing industry in Canada appears to exhibit an implicit sense of textual integrity and wholeness by keeping adaptation to a minimum. House-written material, for narrative in particular, tends to decline across the grades suggesting an increasing emphasis on literature but this decline is partially offset by an increase in expository house-written text in Grade Five. (One table of data is included: 18 references are attached.) (RS)

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Discourse Types in Canadian Basal Reading Programs

In the 1950's, Canadian basal reading programs were little more than "Canadianized" versions of programs from the United States (McInnes, 1987). During the sixties, Canadian programs began to be developed within Canada and, over the past twenty years, have come to look quite different from their U.S. counterparts. End-of-level tests were abandoned. Listening tapes and anthologies for teachers to read to students were added along with novels, writing components and a variety of other basal companion items.

Despite these elements of difference, Canadian reading programs, like their U.S. counterparts, still maintain the basal reading anthology as central to the program. Recent research by Goodman, Shannon, Freeman and Murphy (1988) portrayed the basal anthologies of the U.S. as controlling students and teachers by controlling language and reading. One method through which this control was exercised was through the inclusion of a large amount of house-written and adapted material. The purpose of this study is to examine the authorship and discourse types of Canadian basal anthologies to determine whether the lingering centrality of the basal anthology in Canadian programs reflects similar patterns.

The Role of Textual Material in the Teaching of Reading

When children encounter a text in school or in any other context, they are encountering one possibility of what a text can be. From each text, they sample, make predictions based on, among other things, their past knowledge of texts, and confirm or reject their predictions. They

develop ideas about the "typicality" (Pappas, 1987; Mandler, 1984) of texts in general and, as they read and create increasingly diverse forms of texts, they develop concepts of specific subtypes of texts. For readers who have had few examples of continuous printed discourse before entering school, the basal reader may hold for them what becomes "typical" of texts. For these children, it is important that the textual material they encounter in basal anthologies be at least adequate rather than aberrant representations of discourse types.

Traditionally, the basal reader has not focused on textual wholeness. Rather, it has been viewed as a package of components for the teaching of reading. The reading material that was contained in basal readers assumed little of the children for whom it was produced and was based on the alluring logic of decoding combined with text simplification (through limitations on both the number of words and the complexity of the syntactic environment for those words) (Shannon, 1989). The purpose of basals was to instruct in "how to read" in a very narrow sense. The idea of the text, and not the word, as the smallest unit of meaning (Halliday and Hasan, 1976) was absent in these traditional programs.

The impact of reading limited and controlled texts such as those found in traditional basal programs has been demonstrated repeatedly. Recent research in this area includes that of Eckhoff (1984) who reported that children who read simplified texts often use simplified basal-like language in their writing. Feldman (1985) noted that pre-primer basal texts tend to lack common story structure elements and observed that student recall improved if texts included story structure elements. Unsworth and Williams (1988) also describe how children's

discourse is less focused on meaning when reacting to controlled texts as opposed to texts which are natural at the lexical, clausal and textual level.

Despite such investigations, Goodman et al. (1988) found that controlled texts thrive in the basals of the United States. The degree to which Canadian basals have retained this element is largely unknown.

Methodology

The Canadian series selected for inclusion in the study were: Gage Expressways II, Ginn Journeys, Holt Impressions, McGraw-Hill Ryerson Unicorn, and Nelson Networks. These series were chosen on the basis of a survey of the programs authorized by the Departments of Education in the Canadian provinces and territories. Each selection within every anthology for Grades One, Three and Five was coded on two areas - authorship and discourse-type or genre.

The following categories were used to code authorship: reprinted, house-written, adapted or abridged. A reprint acknowledged the copyright of the text or the permission for use by a specific author, or was a traditional text for which the words and sentences tend to be invariant (such as a nursery rhyme). Adapted texts were those identified as such by the publishing company and generally were texts in which some rudiments of story remained but lexical, syntactic and semantic aspects were simplified. Abridged texts were those identified as such by the publishing company and tended to be texts which were excerpted and made into a unity through an initial summary paragraph overviewing the developments in the text up to that point. House-written texts included those texts for which no specific acknowledgement was given. These operational definitions, while not completely

satisfactory, provided a relatively quick means by which to categorize text authorship.

The genre or discourse type of each selection was also coded to determine if control was exercised more for specific discourse-types. The major categories under which texts were categorized included: narrative (including plays), poetry, biography and exposition (including hybrid texts -"texts that have the form of a narrative piece but the function of an expository piece" [Flood and Lapp, 1987, p.301]).

Because of the differences that emerged between Canadian and U.S. programs and the decision to code a selection as narrative only if it included an event or episode, additional text-type categories were generated for the present study: pictorial text, patterned text and a catch-all category of "other". The category of pictorial text, reflective of the oral discussion and writing emphasis in Canadian programs, included photo essays, wordless texts, posters, and reprints of art-works. Patterned text consisted of a seemingly endless (non-rhyming) repetition of a "linguistic routine without recognizable development of meanings relevant to the social context" (Unsworth and Williams, 1988, p.2). An example of such a routine can be found in the text "What Will I Wear" . The text begins with the statements "Here is my hat. It is orange." and continues a cycle of "Here is my [clothing item]." followed by a statement identifying the colour. There are six repetitions of this pattern before the pattern varies and the text ends with a variation away from the pattern. Finally, the category of "other" was created to cover low-frequency genre forms such as diary excerpts, jokes, riddles, speeches, quotes, alphabet texts, dictionaries and flow-charts.

Tabulations were made of the proportional representations of authorship and genre forms in terms of number of selections and number of pages. For Grade One selections, word and sentence counts were conducted as an additional indicator of text control.

Findings

A summary of authorship data for Canadian programs is presented in Table 1. One pattern of note is the change in the proportion of reprinted text across the grades. Although approximately two thirds of the pages and selections for Grades Three and Five are reprints, at the Grade One level 61% of the selections and 67% of the pages of the texts are house-written. This proportion of house-written material, closely paralleling that found for Grade One programs in the United States by Goodman et al. (1988), suggests that there still appears to be a deliberate effort to control Grade One level text in Canadian reading programs.

Insert Table 1 about here

Residues of control in Grade One programs. The control in Grade One programs is manifested in several ways. First of all, 12% of the selections and 13% of the pages for Grade One texts fell into the category of patterned texts. Almost all of the patterned text (91% of selections and 89% of pages) was house-written -- an indication that the Canadian basal publishing industry is still reluctant to let go of the conception that basals are for teaching how to read as opposed to being for reading.

Control is also manifested through a reduction in syntactic

complexity in the Grade One texts. Approximately 70% of Grade One material was narrative and the greater majority of that text (89%) consisted of stories (as opposed to folktales, fables, and fairytales). When house-written and reprinted basal readers are compared on the average number words per sentence (WPS) and the average number of words per text (WPT), WPS averages were higher for reprinted material in six of eight readers examined and WPT averages were higher for reprinted material in seven of eight readers examined. These comparisons suggest that house written texts tended to be less syntactically complex (as measured by WPS) and shorter than those which the same publishers selected to reprint in the readers. For some of the house-written material, controlling features could only be seen through global comparisons. However, the following excerpt also indicates that some selections were transparent in limiting lexical and syntactic complexity: "Look at me jump, Muffles,. Come jump with me. It is fun." (Kleitsch, 1984, p.11). This selection, reminiscent of the "See Spot run" texts that have become the public trademark of basal reading, indicates that some of the house-written selections in Canadian textbooks leave considerable room for improvement.

A third avenue through which textual control was manifested in Grade One was exemplified through the formulaic approaches to writing that house-writers used for some of the selections. In formulaic writing, like patterned writing, a repetitive sequence was generally in evidence but formulaic writing included either an informational focus which meant it could be coded as expository or an event/episode which meant it could be coded as narrative. For instance, in the selection entitled " A Long Long Time Ago" (1986), the initial text segment is "A

long, long time ago, when I was very small, I couldn't fly my kite. My best friend helped me fly my kite. Flying is easy now." (pp. 16-17). The text is repeated over four more times with the only variation being that the activity which couldn't be done and was eventually accomplished changes with each cycle of repetition and culminates in the statement "Everything is easy when best friends help you learn." (p. 26). The selection has event sequences which enable it to be coded as narrative. However, the similarity to patterned text described earlier is also evident.

These formulaic texts, moreso for narrative than expository, tend to be natural at the lexical and clausal level but often lack integrated text unity at the whole text level. Authors of house-written material have drawn upon the wide array of writing and research on the efficacy of predictable texts (e.g. Bridge, 1979, 1983; Rhodes, 1981) in order to "engineer" texts which repeat lexical, clausal or sometimes story structure elements. Some of these efforts are less than successful. The result is pedestrian writing, not much more interesting than the controlled texts of the sixties, because the repetition has been designed into the text for the purpose of repetition rather than having emerged as integral to the meaning of the text itself.

Lexical control is evident for some of the house-written material in the Grade One texts. The fact that lexical control can still be found in some Canadian texts is best exemplified by contrasting the introductory portion of one of the few adapted texts with its original. The original reads: "Once upon a time there was a little White Rabbit with two beautiful pink ears and two bright red eyes and four soft little feet — SUCH a pretty little white rabbit, but he wasn't happy.

Just think, this little White Rabbit wanted to be somebody else instead of the nice little rabbit that he was." (Bailey, 1961). The adapted text read "Little Rabbit was not happy. He wanted to look like other animals." ("Little rabbit's", 1984). For some programs, such as McGraw-Hill Ryerson (1984), control over words extends to the inclusion of word lists on the inside cover of each Grade One basal and house-written selections whose only purpose is to repeat color words.

Patterns in Grades Three and Five. Within Grades Three and Five, the proportion of reprinted material is almost identical (about 66%). However, more material is house-written at Grade Five. This is accounted for by two factors. First, Grade Three readers have the highest proportion of adapted material (9%) of any grade. This pattern, combined with the fact that most of the adapted material is narrative, indicates that basal companies have diverted the control from house-writing to adaptation in Grade Three.

Secondly, the levelling off, at Grade Five, of the trend to incorporate more and more reprinted material is partially attributable to the increasing number of expository selections. In some of the series, influences from metacognitive research, along with an emphasis on reading across the curriculum, resulted in a number of expository house-written pieces which focused on how to read in the content areas. These "how to read texts" were present in Grade Five, in which 64% of expository text was house-written, but not in Grade Three, in which 49% of expository text was house-written. Because these texts build on other textual material within the basals, they were more likely to be house-written. (Note: Excluded from the analysis were the separate textbooks on how to read/write that Nelson and Ginn have as a program

component additional to the basal. Had these been included, the percentages of house-written material would probably have increased at Grade Five.)

The "how to read" texts attempt to get at valuable issues such as reading strategies for content area subjects. However, their inclusion in a basal anthology, as opposed to arising naturally within the context of an area/topic, raises the additional question of the role of the basal in school programs. At least some authority is given to the students as authors of their own reading experiences through the direction of comments to the students rather than through the teacher. Alternatively, other less restrictive forums, such as discussions during the investigation of a topic, would allow students to create and pool their own strategies in contexts which genuinely raise the question "How do I go about reading this text?"

Discussion

Canadian reading programs still exhibit some of the controlling features that Goodman et al. (1988) observed as characteristic of readers produced in the United States. The most problematic pattern is the high proportion of house-written material in Grade One. Much of the Grade One material is formulaic and, as such, may end up creating a new stereotype for basals -- that of the pattern. While good predictable books, and even some pattern books, can enhance literacy development, their use needs to be balanced by the use of other forms. Children need to have opportunities both to build on prior knowledge of text types, as well as on the prosodic, lexical, clausal and textual elements, to develop hypotheses about print that help them create personal frameworks for more complex hypotheses. Some predictable books can be used towards

such ends; however, many of the engineered patterned texts found in Grade One readers would result in the misguided development of a concept of text as a structure rather than as a meaningful entity that happens to have a particular structure.

Despite the few instances of slippage in which impoverished adaptations of already published texts were produced, the basal publishing industry in Canada appears to exhibit an implicit sense of textual integrity and wholeness by keeping adaptation to a minimum. House-written material, for narrative in particular, tends to decline across the grades suggesting an increasing emphasis on literature but this decline is partially offset by an increase in expository house-written text in Grade Five. Here again, the Canadian basal industry is struggling with the competing ideas of "how to read" as opposed to "reading". Whether the industry will move further in establishing its distinctiveness from U.S. programs will be revealed in the round of programs released in the nineties.

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Table 1

Authorship of Canadian Selections

Authorship	Grade One	Grade Three	Grade Five	Total
Reprint:				
% of Selections	35.70	66.60	65.00	58.44
% of Pages	29.00	63.00	66.00	53.57
Abridged:				
% of Selections	0.28	0.27	0.40	0.34
% of Pages	0.30	0.30	0.70	0.46
Adapted:				
% of Selections	2.80	8.00	2.60	4.00
% of Pages	3.50	9.80	5.00	6.06
House:				
% of Selections	61.00	25.00	32.00	37.22
% of Pages	67.00	26.50	28.00	39.90